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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 004925

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/08/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [NP](#) [BT](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: BHUTANESE REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT - GOI TELLS A/S
SAUERBREY IT WILL WORK WITH USG BUT NOT IOM

Classified By: PolCouns Ted Osius for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Joint Secretary for Bhutan and Nepal Preeti Saran and MEA Joint

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Secretary for Americas Gaitri Kumar told Assistant Secretary

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for Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) Ellen Sauerbrey November 8 that the Government of India (GOI) was prepared to assist the USG in any way possible with the resettlement of Bhutanese refugees. However, the GOI would only work with the U.S. Embassy on the issue, and would not work with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), nor would it allow the IOM to assist refugees in its airports. A/S Sauerbrey explained the potential difficulties and numerous logistical details involved in helping refugees transit through an airport such as Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi. Kumar agreed to talk to the appropriate Indian authorities to try to find a solution and to test whether the GOI would accept a limited working relationship with IOM. She warned, however, that the transit of Bhutanese refugees through India could potentially be delayed in the process of working out a solution. END SUMMARY.

The IOM Would Not Be Welcome in Indian Airports

12. (C) Assistant Secretary for PRM Ellen Sauerbrey spoke November 8 to MEA Joint Secretary for Bhutan and Nepal Preeti Saran regarding the GOI's role in the transit of Bhutanese refugees through Indian airports on their way to resettlement in the United States. Saran stated that the presence of IOM in Indian airports would not be welcome, and asked whether the refugees could transit through another country. A/S Sauerbrey pointed out that IOM had done a study to find the most cost-effective and least onerous route through which the refugees should transit, and determined that New Delhi was the best option. Saran indicated that the refugee issue was not in her mandate and that she was unfamiliar with the position of the Ministry of Home Affairs on the issue, but agreed to relay the concerns of the USG to the appropriate authorities. "We will facilitate," she asserted, but added

the caveat that if it became "too complicated," perhaps the USG should look into using another route. A/S Sauerbrey thanked her for the GOI's offer to help, underlining that the USG needed the GOI's assistance in giving the refugees as smooth a transition as possible.

Indian Immigration and Aviation Officials Will Handle
Transiting Refugees Just Fine, Thank You

¶3. (C) MEA Joint Secretary for Americas Gaitri Kumar told A/S Sauerbrey separately November 8 that the GOI was interested in "being as helpful and courteous as possible to the Bhutanese refugees and to (the U.S.) government." She said that she had received a letter recently from IOM detailing what the GOI would be asked to do to facilitate the Bhutanese refugees. According to the IOM, tasks required include: compiling a list of refugees, shepherding refugees through the airport, providing the refugees with a packet of food, ensuring refugees got to their departure gate, boarding the refugees onto airplanes, and providing a passenger manifest to the authorities. Kumar said that she had approached the Bureau of Immigration and the Ministry of Civil Aviation to ask them how the GOI would go about performing these tasks. Their response was that food and drink were readily available in the transit area, the refugees would be issued boarding passes for their next flight, and that the immigration authorities would bear the responsibility for looking out for the refugees and would see to it that they were properly facilitated in the airport. In the event of a flight delay, the refugees would be given a three-day pass allowing them to move about in India until their flight departed. In case a refugee did not want to leave the airport, the immigration authorities would "take care of them," according to Kumar. Other than their lack of passports for documentation, the refugees were "just like any

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other travelers," opined Kumar, adding that the authorities of Indira Gandhi International Airport dealt with hundreds of passengers such as this a daily basis. She added that Indians spoke Hindi, which was similar to Nepali, suggesting that the USG and the GOI needed to work out a simple agreement at the ground level. "Culturally, it's not difficult for the refugees to transit through New Delhi, where they can speak Hindi or Nepalese," Kumar claimed.

¶4. (C) A/S Sauerbrey rebutted Kumar's argument with a description of Bhutanese refugees, explaining that many of them had been born and raised in refugee camps and that some had never seen an airport or a toilet. She pointed out approximately 70-100 refugees per flight - or 1,500 refugees a month - would be passing through the airport, and that there would be language problems and cultural issues with which the Indian authorities would also have to contend. Additionally, A/S Sauerbrey signaled that refugees leaving the airport due to a delayed flight would be an issue of major concern to the USG, contending that, overall, transiting refugees would be an overwhelming burden for the Indian airport and immigration authorities, and a security nightmare for the Indian government.

The Crux of the Issue: India is Not a Member of the IOM

¶5. (C) Kumar insisted that there were several agencies on high security alert in the airport, and therefore it was difficult to allow a new organization to have access to the airport's secure areas, especially over a period of five years. Kumar acknowledged that the GOI was not a member of the IOM, and that this was problematic. Kumar relayed that her instructions were work with the U.S. Embassy and to do anything to assist the USG with the transit of Bhutanese refugees, giving courtesies to the U.S., Bhutan and Nepal. However, she was not authorized to give any courtesy to the IOM. "As long as it is not the IOM in my airport, my secure

area, my protocol, or my transit area, I don't have a problem," she elucidated. Kumar raised the prospect of working through the UN High Commission for Refugees as an alternative to the IOM. A/S Sauerbrey informed her that the USG was legally mandated to use only the IOM for processing refugees.

16. (C) In the end, Kumar affirmed that she understood A/S Sauerbrey's points, and agreed to speak to the proper Indian authorities to try to work out a solution which would involve the IOM. She made no promises, warning that she did not have the authority to make a decision on the issue, but she promised to try. "We have to work it out to keep from giving the refugees one more hurdle," she observed.

Saran Raises Tibetan Refugees

17. (C) In a discussion on Tibetan refugees, Saran asked if the USG had agreed to resettle Tibetan refugees in Nepal also. A/S Sauerbrey responded that the USG had offered to resettle 5,000 Tibetan refugees already, but that the Government of Nepal had not approved their resettlement due to pressure from China. Having just come from Nepal, A/S Sauerbrey noted that Prime Minister Koirala had told her that Tibetan refugees were free to cross into India and asked Saran if India would provide exit permits and allow them to be processed on its territory. Saran replied that the Indo-Nepal border was open with free movement on both sides. A/S Sauerbrey emphasized that, if there was a way to allow Tibetan refugees to be resettled through India, the USG would be happy to resettle them. Saran answered again that this issue was not part of her mandate, but acknowledged that this was a generous offer.

Comment: IOM Problematic for GOI

18. (C) We believe that Kumar will make a sincere attempt to

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convey USG concerns to the authorities, and that she will fight the good fight in order to get the Indian government to allow IOM involvement in the Bhutanese refugee resettlement process. However, we are not convinced that her powers of persuasion will succeed in moving the Indian government. From the GOI point of view, IOM is the thin edge of the wedge that would lead to international involvement in Sri Lankan, Tibetan, Burmese and maybe Kashmiri refugees. Kumar may find it especially difficult to persuade the Ministry of Home Affairs to abandon its opposition to a role for IOM. The solution might involve: a) using another transit point such as Dubai or Bangkok; or b), accrediting a person or persons with appropriate expertise in refugee management to the Embassy in New Delhi during the period that Bhutanese refugees will transit India. End Comment.

19. (U) A/S Sauerbrey did not clear this message prior to her departure from New Delhi.

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